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RUEHDM/AMEMBASSY DAMASCUS PRIORITY 1226
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RHMFISS/HQ USCENTCOM MACDILL AFB FL PRIORITY
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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 MANAMA 000845

SIPDIS

BAGHDAD FOR AMBASSADOR ERELI

E.O. 12958: DECL: 12/31/2023

TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PTER](#) [PHUM](#) [SY](#) [BA](#)

SUBJECT: ADDITIONAL ARRESTS IN ALLEGED NATIONAL DAY BOMB
PLOT

REF: A. MANAMA 816

[1](#)B. MANAMA 762

[1](#)C. MANAMA 742

Classified By: CDA Christopher Henzel for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

[1](#)1. (C) Summary: The GOB claimed that a pipe bomb plot implicated Shi'a oppositionists in London, and that some plotters trained in Syria. Bahraini Shi'a are skeptical and angry over the charges. The GOB charges beg many questions, and the USG should treat them cautiously until more evidence comes forward. End summary.

[1](#)2. (U) Bahraini authorities have arrested fourteen Shi'a Bahrainis so far in connection with an alleged plot (ref A) to set off explosions during Bahrain's National Day celebrations December 16-17.

[1](#)3. (C) Police contacts initially described to us an amateurish plan by two Shi'a men to construct what amounted to pipe bombs, using small cooking gas canisters as explosive. The men had no detonators, and hoped the devices would eventually cook off when placed in burning garbage.

[1](#)4. (C) Initial contacts also indicated that the GOB intelligence service, the Bahrain National Security Agency, was taking the lead. The BNSA's director, Shaikh Khalifa bin Abdullah Al Khalifah, came to the job in April after a brief stint as Bahraini Ambassador in London. He is close to the King, but lacks experience in police and intelligence work.

[1](#)5. (C) The GOB gave the case a new, more serious spin December 27 when Interior Minister Rashid bin Abdullah Al Khalifah gave a televised press conference charging that the plotters planned to place three of these home-made bombs in shopping malls and other public areas. He asserted that the plotters trained in bomb-making at a camp in Syria, and had links to radical exiles in the United Kingdom. Bahrain's Foreign Minister phoned CDA and several European chiefs of mission to stress the seriousness of the alleged plot and request support. On December 28, Bahraini state television broadcast confessions by a number of the detainees. The GCC summit's December 30 communique included praise for the GOB's disruption of the alleged plot.

Alleged Connection to Syria . . .

[1](#)6. (C) Shaikh Rashid told CDA December 30 that BNSA was initially in the lead, but that he had recently been directed to take a larger role in the case. The minister claimed the GOB had been working with the Syrian government for months because he had information that the Shi'a radicals trained at

a camp in Syria. He said he did not yet know the location in Syria of the camp.

¶7. (C) Shaikh Rashid said two Syrian security officials would be arriving in Bahrain later that day to update him on their investigation, but he did not expect any new useful information.

. . . And Britain

¶8. (SBU) Shaikh Rashid also claimed that evidence would come out at trial showing that the plotters were in league with radical Shi'a opposition politicians. One, Abdurrauf Sha'ib, is in self-imposed exile in London. Another, Ali Musha'ima, is studying there, and is the son of Hassan Musha'ima, a leader of the Shi'a Haq movement, which opposes participation in Bahrain's elections.

Shi'a Skeptical, Angry

¶9. (C) Shaikh Rashid was frustrated that Bahrain's Shi'a community had rallied around the accused "as usual." He said he would meet soon with Ali Salman, the Shi'a cleric who leads the Wifaq party, to seek his support. Post's contacts in Wifaq privately express skepticism about aspects of the government's charges, but are taking no position publicly for now.

¶10. (SBU) Most Shi'a Bahrainis believe the alleged plot was

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a small-time crime which the government inflated in order to discredit oppositionists. Family of the detainees are already asserting publicly that their relatives must have been coerced into their confessions, though there is as of yet no evidence of mistreatment. On December 30 Sunni members of parliament attempted to introduce a motion condemning the alleged plot, setting off shouting matches that brought the chamber's work to a halt.

¶11. (C) Comment: It is out of character for the normally cautious Shaikh Rashid to go public with allegations that beg as many questions as these do; the government's approach probably has the blessing of the King. This approach reflects the Sunni community's mounting frustration with perceived opposition insults and with continuing street violence (refs B and C). The USG should adopt a wait-and-see posture toward the charges until there is more evidence.

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